

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

4.0 Introduction

This study was undertaken to investigate the use of homophones among upper secondary Malay students. Data was collected using four different tests which were given to 30 Malay students of Form Four. In this chapter, the errors involving the 20 pairs of homophones tested are analysed. Each homophone was tested twice. On the whole, 80 questions were administered to the students. Tables 10-14 in the following pages depict the analysis of the results of each test followed by a response graph. Tables 15 and 16, however, indicate the homophones sorted by Degree of Difficulty by Test and the Overall Degree of Difficulty. Since many of the homophones registered a similar percentage of correct responses, the degree of difficulty of these homophones is the same. For instance, although twenty homophones were tested in Test 1, homophones such as *aisle*, *grate*, *vane*, *sore*, and *knead* ranked 4th simultaneously in terms of difficulty. Consequently, the ranking for the degree of difficulty will not necessarily be 1-20 in all the four tests. Therefore, in Test 1 the degree of difficulty ranks from 1-8, Test 2 from 1 – 9, Test 3 from 1 – 13 and Test 4 from 1 – 10.

4.1 Analysis of Test Results

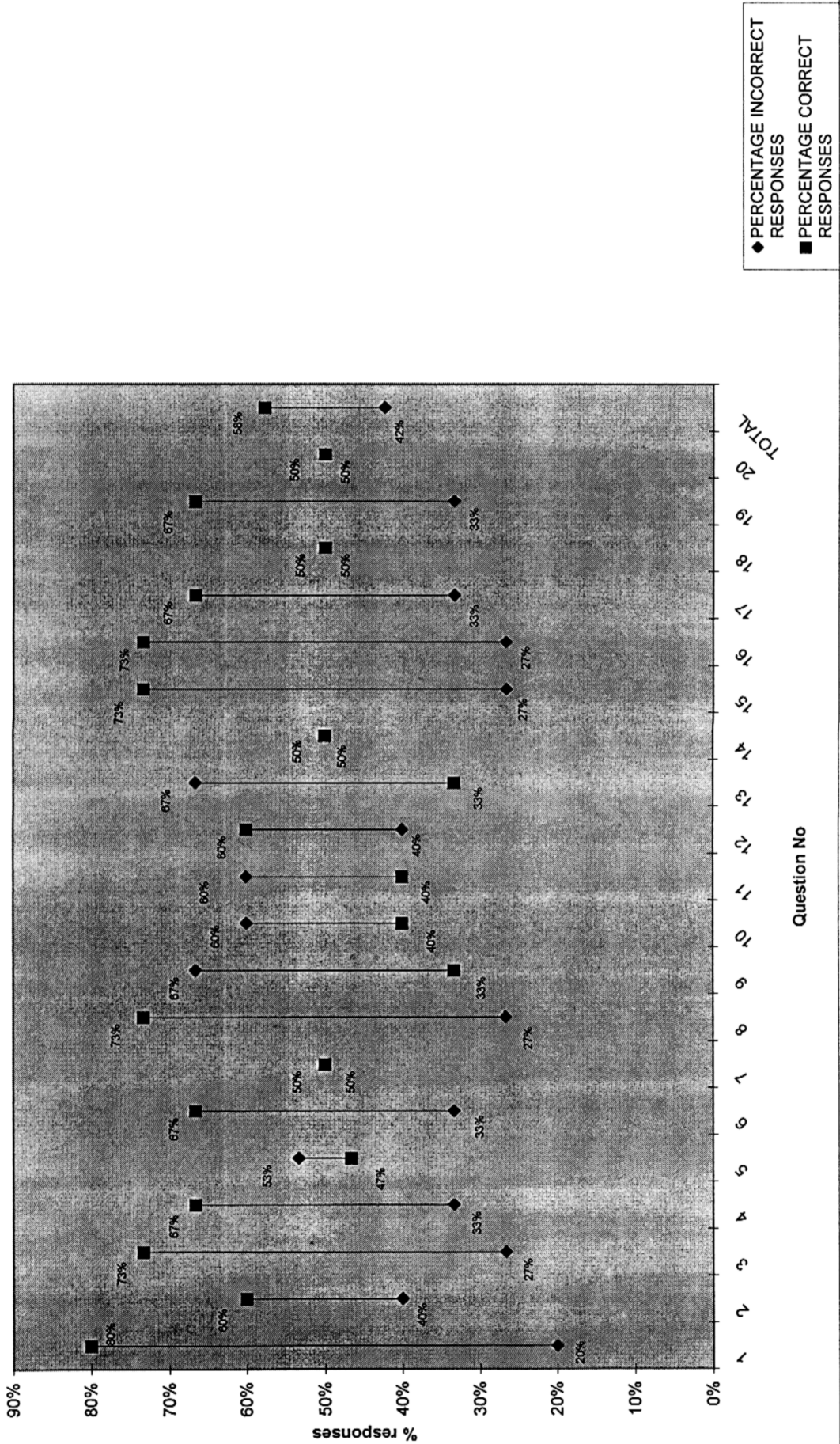
4.1.1 Analysis of Test 1 Results.

Test 1 is a relatively simple test. The students were required to underline the correct homophonic word from the pair given in brackets in each sentence. 20 homophones were tested as indicated in Table 11 (a). Out of 600 responses, 346 were correct (58%) and 254 were incorrect (42%). In Test 1, the most difficult homophones were *currant* , *peddles*, *idle*, *mane* and *knead*. The least difficult ones were *loan*, *feat* and *tale*.

Table 11(a): Percentage of Correct and Incorrect Responses in Test 1

QUESTION NO.	ITEM TESTED	NO.OF RESPONSES	NO. OF INCORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE INCORRECT RESPONSES	NO. OF CORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE CORRECT RESPONSES
1	tale	30	6	20%	24	80%
2	route	30	12	40%	18	60%
3	mourning	30	8	27%	22	73%
4	sauce	30	10	33%	20	67%
5	knead	30	16	53%	14	47%
6	steel	30	10	33%	20	67%
7	sore	30	15	50%	15	50%
8	serial	30	8	27%	22	73%
9	currant	30	20	67%	10	33%
10	idle	30	18	60%	12	40%
11	mane	30	18	60%	12	40%
12	styles	30	12	40%	18	60%
13	peddles	30	20	67%	10	33%
14	vane	30	15	50%	15	50%
15	loan	30	8	27%	22	73%
16	feat	30	8	27%	22	73%
17	lane	30	10	33%	20	67%
18	grate	30	15	50%	15	50%
19	rapping	30	10	33%	20	67%
20	aisle	30	15	50%	15	50%
TOTAL		600	254	42%	346	58%

Table 11(b): Response Graph for Test 1



4.1.2 Analysis of Test 2 Results.

Test 2 proved to be more difficult for the students. Unlike Test 1, where the students had to choose the correct homophone from a given pair, the second task was not guided at all. It is a task that required the students to underline the erroneous words (homophones) in the 20 sentences given and to correct them in the spaces provided. Out of 600 responses, the number of errors recorded was 394 (66%). This means that more than half of the students could not attempt this task successfully. Table 12(a) represents that the homophones *sore*, *pedal* and *aisle* were difficult lexical items as 87% of the responses for these items were incorrect. The least difficult to identify were *tail* and *cereal* which resulted in only 40% of incorrect responses. There was a strong tendency for the students to consider other parts of speech as incorrect. The following sentences exemplify this point.

12) Don't tell him anything in the morning. He is like a bear with a
soar head.

The verb 'tell' was underlined and replaced with the verb 'told' and the verb 'like' was underlined and replaced with the verb 'likes' or 'liked'. In the sentence,

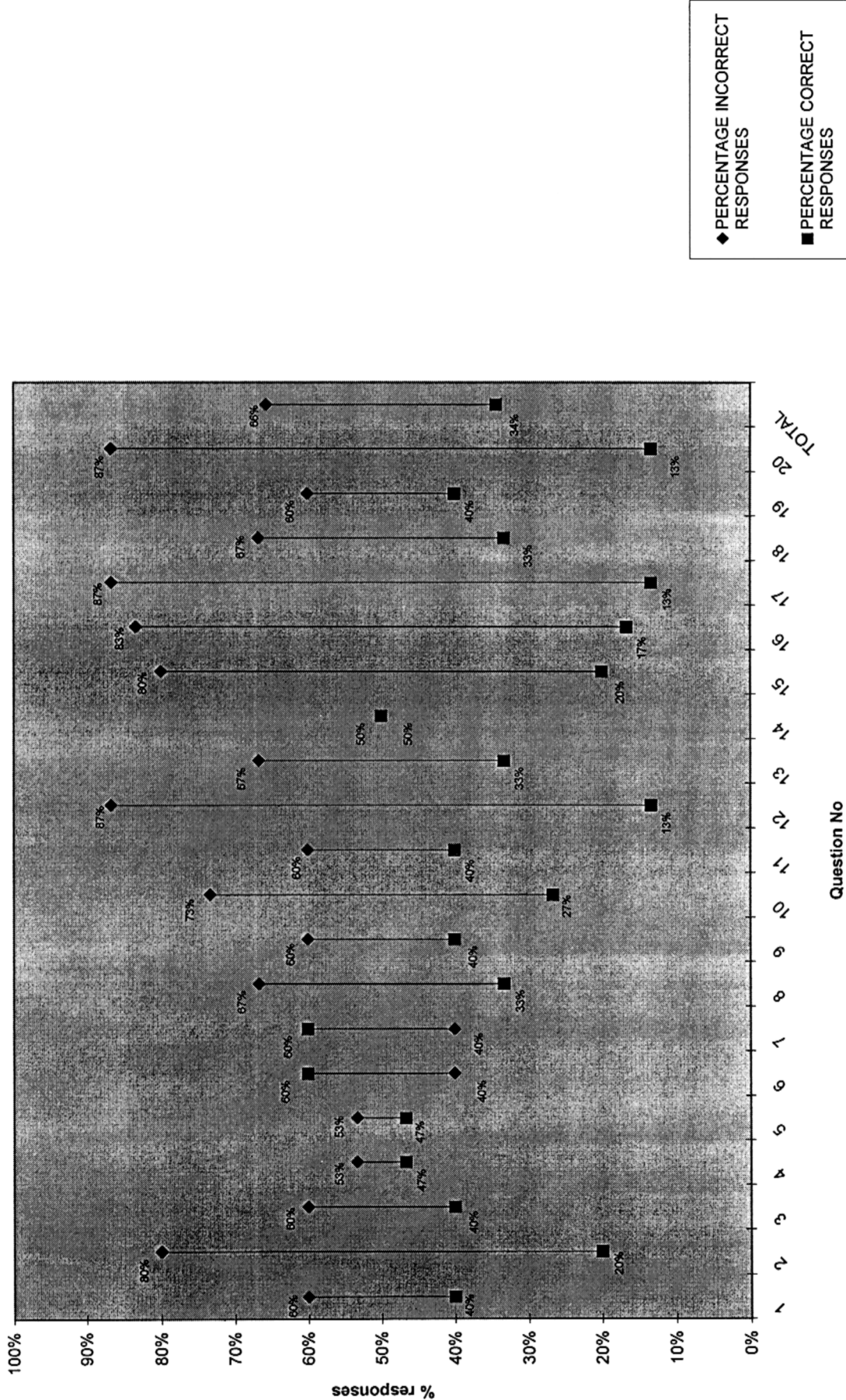
15) Many factories have closed down. Therefore, many machines
were idol.

the verb 'was' was replaced with 'is' or 'are', 'closed' with 'closes' or 'closing' and 'Many' was replaced with the determiner 'A lot of'.

Table 12(a): Percentage of Correct and Incorrect Responses in Test 2

QUESTION NO.	ITEM TESTED	NO.OF RESPONSES	NO. OF INCORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE INCORRECT RESPONSES	NO. OF CORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE CORRECT RESPONSES
1	vain	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	feat	30	24	80%	6	20%
3	wrap	30	18	60%	12	40%
4	morning	30	16	53%	14	47%
5	root	30	16	53%	14	47%
6	tail	30	12	40%	18	60%
7	cereal	30	12	40%	18	60%
8	main	30	20	67%	10	33%
9	great	30	18	60%	12	40%
10	current	30	22	73%	8	27%
11	need	30	18	60%	12	40%
12	sore	30	26	87%	4	13%
13	steel	30	20	67%	10	33%
14	sauce	30	15	50%	15	50%
15	idle	30	24	80%	6	20%
16	style	30	25	83%	5	17%
17	pedal	30	26	87%	4	13%
18	lone	30	20	67%	10	33%
19	lane	30	18	60%	12	40%
20	aisle	30	26	87%	4	13%
TOTAL		600	394	66%	206	34%

Table 12(b): Response Graph for Test 2



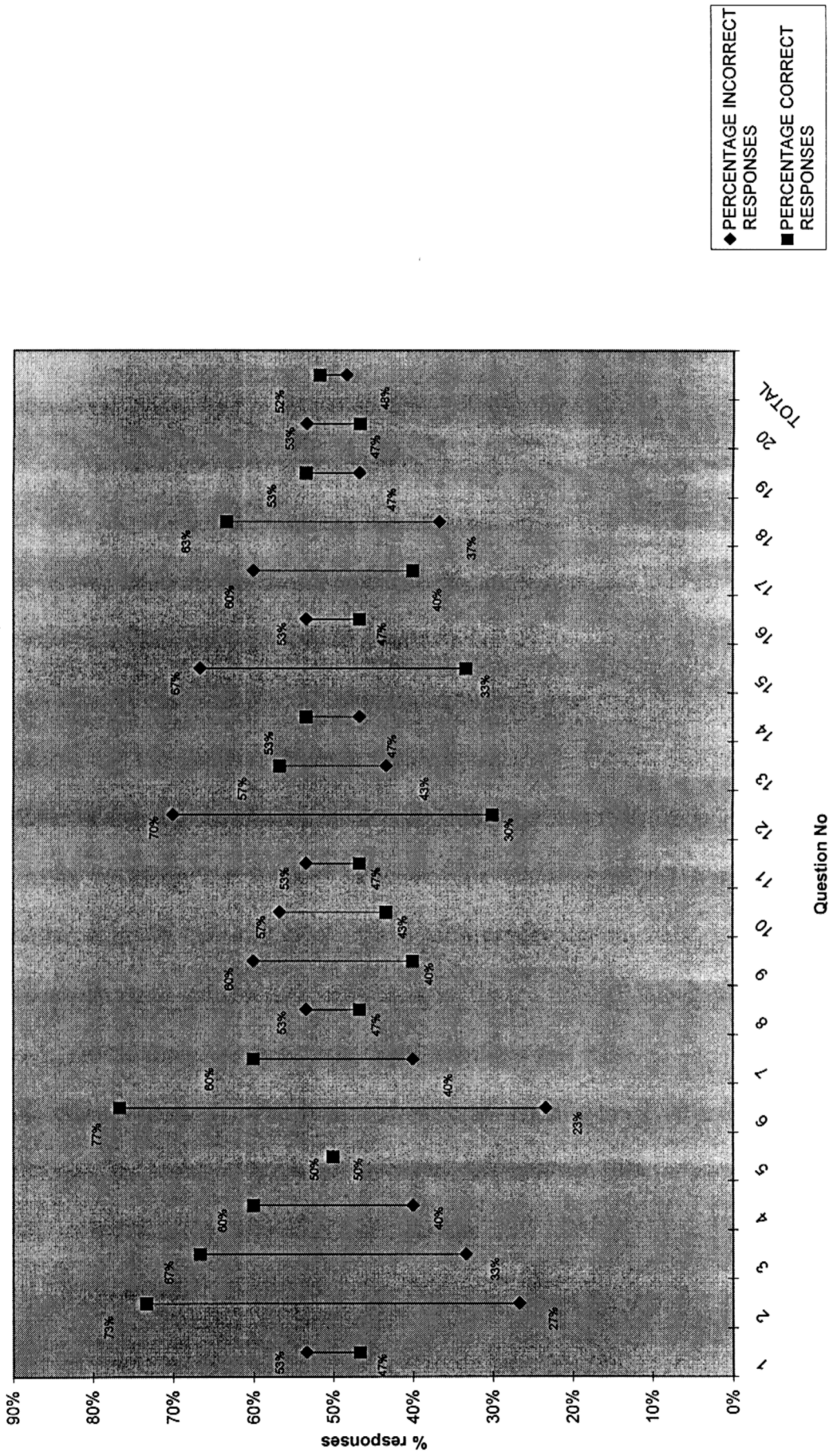
4.1.3 Analysis of Test 3 Results.

Test 3 exploits the listening skill. Here, students were required to listen to 20 sentences each of which were read out twice, and to circle the homophonic word that they heard in each sentence. The correct responses to this task would indicate the students' ability to listen, comprehend and choose a suitable homophone as used within a given context. Table 13 (a) indicates that only 52% of the 600 responses were correct. The majority of the respondents had a problem with the homophone *knead* which resulted in 70% incorrect responses. This was followed by *idol* (67%), *great* (60%), *current* (57%), *vain*, *mane*, *sauce*, *stile* and *isles* (53% each), *route* (50%), *soar* and *lain* (47% each), *steal* (43%) , *mourning* and *serial* (40% each), *lone* (37%), *rap* (33%), *feet* (27%) and *tails* (23%) which was the least difficult.

Table 13(a): Percentage of Correct and Incorrect Responses in Test 3

QUESTION NO.	ITEM TESTED	NO.OF RESPONSES	NO. OF INCORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE INCORRECT RESPONSES	NO. OF CORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE CORRECT RESPONSES
1	vain	30	16	53%	14	47%
2	feet	30	8	27%	22	73%
3	rap	30	10	33%	20	67%
4	mourning	30	12	40%	18	60%
5	route	30	15	50%	15	50%
6	tails	30	7	23%	23	77%
7	serial	30	12	40%	18	60%
8	mane	30	16	53%	14	47%
9	great	30	18	60%	12	40%
10	current	30	17	57%	13	43%
11	source	30	16	53%	14	47%
12	knead	30	21	70%	9	30%
13	steal	30	13	43%	17	57%
14	soar	30	14	47%	16	53%
15	idol	30	20	67%	10	33%
16	stile	30	16	53%	14	47%
17	peddles	30	18	60%	12	40%
18	loan	30	11	37%	19	63%
19	lain	30	14	47%	16	53%
20	isles	30	16	53%	14	47%
TOTAL		600	290	48%	310	52%

Table13(b): Response Graph for Test 3



4.1.4 Analysis of Test 4 Results.

Test 4 was the final test given to the students. Again this was a guided task requiring the students to fill in the blanks in the sentences given with one suitable homophone from a list of 20 pairs of homophones. The number of homophones tested were 20. Students had great difficulty in filling in the blanks with the correct homophone. There were quite a number of ridiculous answers provided by the weaker students. For example :

3) The *grate* wolf howled at the moon.

(The correct response should be *lone*).

4) Natasha has *cereal* on the bed for more than two hours.

(The correct response should be *lain*.).

19) The wind *style* is very popular in farm – houses.

(The correct response should be *vane*).

53% of the responses were incorrect , indicating that the respondents were unable to gauge the semantic relationships signaled by the homophones within a given context. The errors made reflect the students' inadequate vocabulary and general lack of proficiency in the English language. In this test , the homophones *grate*, *lain*, *steal*, *need* and *feet* received less than 50% incorrect responses. The lexical item *lone* was the most difficult (70%) followed by *pedal* (67%), *morning* (63%), *soar* (60%), *stile* (60%) *main* and *source* (75% each), *wrapped*, *tales*, *currant*, *isle* (53% each) and *idols* and *root* (50% each).

Table 14(a): Percentage of Correct and Incorrect Responses in Test 4

QUESTION NO.	ITEM TESTED	NO.OF RESPONSES	NO. OF INCORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE INCORRECT RESPONSES	NO. OF CORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE CORRECT RESPONSES
1	morning	30	19	63%	11	37%
2	soar	30	18	60%	12	40%
3	lone	30	21	70%	9	30%
4	feet	30	10	33%	20	67%
5	wrapped	30	16	53%	14	47%
6	grate	30	14	47%	16	53%
7	idols	30	15	50%	15	50%
8	main	30	17	57%	13	43%
9	need	30	12	40%	18	60%
10	lain	30	14	47%	16	53%
11	tales	30	16	53%	14	47%
12	pedal	30	20	67%	10	33%
13	cereal	30	12	40%	18	60%
14	currant	30	16	53%	14	47%
15	stile	30	18	60%	12	40%
16	root	30	15	50%	15	50%
17	steal	30	14	47%	16	53%
18	source	30	17	57%	13	43%
19	vane	30	18	60%	12	40%
20	isle	30	16	53%	14	47%
TOTAL		600	318	53%	282	47%

Table14(b): Response Graph for Test 4

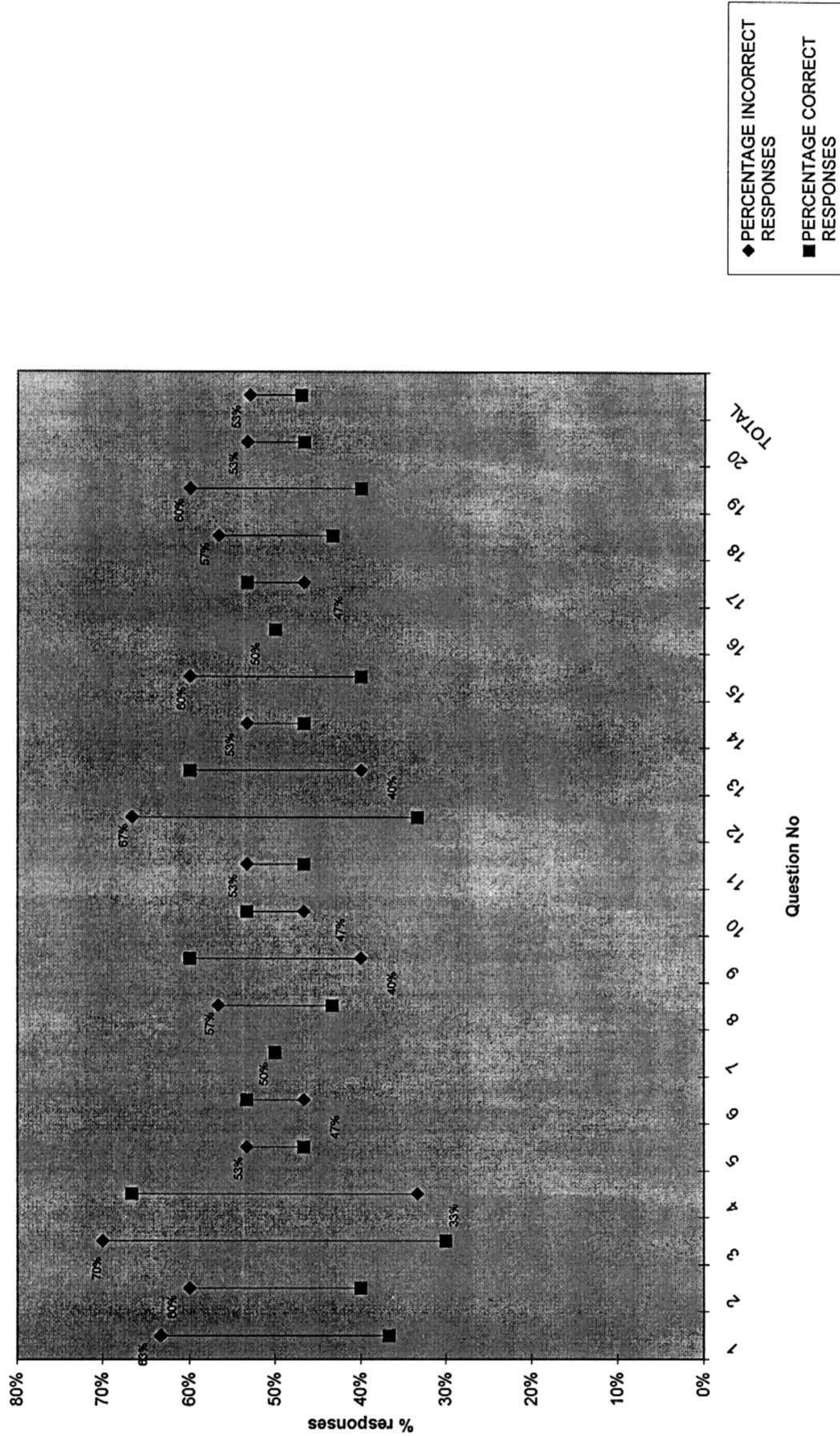


TABLE 15: Homophones Sorted by Degree of Difficulty by Test

TEST	QUESTION NO	ITEM TESTED	NO.OF RESPONSES	NO. OF INCORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE INCORRECT RESPONSES	NO. OF CORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE CORRECT RESPONSES
1	9	currant	30	20	67%	10	33%
1	13	peddles	30	20	67%	10	33%
1	10	idle	30	18	60%	12	40%
1	11	mane	30	18	60%	12	40%
1	5	knead	30	16	53%	14	47%
1	7	sore	30	15	50%	15	50%
1	14	vane	30	15	50%	15	50%
1	18	grate	30	15	50%	15	50%
1	20	aisle	30	15	50%	15	50%
1	2	route	30	12	40%	18	60%
1	12	styles	30	12	40%	18	60%
1	4	sauce	30	10	33%	20	67%
1	6	steel	30	10	33%	20	67%
1	17	lane	30	10	33%	20	67%
1	19	rapping	30	10	33%	20	67%
1	3	mourning	30	8	27%	22	73%
1	8	serial	30	8	27%	22	73%
1	15	loan	30	8	27%	22	73%
1	16	feat	30	8	27%	22	73%
1	1	tale	30	6	20%	24	80%
2	12	sore	30	26	87%	4	13%
2	17	pedal	30	26	87%	4	13%
2	20	aisle	30	26	87%	4	13%
2	16	style	30	25	83%	5	17%
2	2	feat	30	24	80%	6	20%
2	15	idle	30	24	80%	6	20%
2	10	current	30	22	73%	8	27%
2	8	main	30	20	67%	10	33%
2	13	steel	30	20	67%	10	33%
2	18	lone	30	20	67%	10	33%
2	1	vain	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	3	wrap	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	9	great	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	11	need	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	19	lane	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	4	morning	30	16	53%	14	47%
2	5	root	30	16	53%	14	47%
2	14	sauce	30	15	50%	15	50%
2	6	tail	30	12	40%	18	60%
2	7	cereal	30	12	40%	18	60%
3	12	knead	30	21	70%	9	30%
3	15	idol	30	20	67%	10	33%
3	9	great	30	18	60%	12	40%
3	17	peddles	30	18	60%	12	40%
3	10	current	30	17	57%	13	43%
3	1	vain	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	8	mane	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	11	source	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	16	stile	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	20	isles	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	5	route	30	15	50%	15	50%
3	14	soar	30	14	47%	16	53%
3	19	lain	30	14	47%	16	53%
3	13	steal	30	13	43%	17	57%
3	4	mourning	30	12	40%	18	60%
3	7	serial	30	12	40%	18	60%
3	18	loan	30	11	37%	19	63%
3	3	rap	30	10	33%	20	67%
3	2	feet	30	8	27%	22	73%
3	6	tails	30	7	23%	23	77%
4	3	lone	30	21	70%	9	30%
4	12	pedal	30	20	67%	10	33%
4	1	morning	30	19	63%	11	37%
4	2	soar	30	18	60%	12	40%
4	15	stile	30	18	60%	12	40%
4	19	vane	30	18	60%	12	40%
4	8	main	30	17	57%	13	43%
4	18	source	30	17	57%	13	43%
4	5	wrapped	30	16	53%	14	47%
4	11	tales	30	16	53%	14	47%
4	14	currant	30	16	53%	14	47%
4	20	isle	30	16	53%	14	47%
4	7	idols	30	15	50%	15	50%
4	16	root	30	15	50%	15	50%
4	6	grate	30	14	47%	16	53%
4	10	lain	30	14	47%	16	53%
4	17	steal	30	14	47%	16	53%
4	9	need	30	12	40%	18	60%
4	13	cereal	30	12	40%	18	60%
4	4	feet	30	10	33%	20	67%

TABLE16: Homophones Sorted by Overall Degree of Difficulty

TEST	QUESTION NO	ITEM TESTED	NO.OF RESPONSES	NO. OF INCORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE INCORRECT RESPONSES	NO. OF CORRECT RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE CORRECT RESPONSES
2	12	sore	30	26	87%	4	13%
2	17	pedal	30	26	87%	4	13%
2	20	aisle	30	26	87%	4	13%
2	16	style	30	25	83%	5	17%
2	2	feat	30	24	80%	6	20%
2	15	idle	30	24	80%	6	20%
2	10	current	30	22	73%	8	27%
3	12	knead	30	21	70%	9	30%
4	3	lone	30	21	70%	9	30%
1	9	currant	30	20	67%	10	33%
1	13	peddles	30	20	67%	10	33%
2	8	main	30	20	67%	10	33%
2	13	steel	30	20	67%	10	33%
2	18	lone	30	20	67%	10	33%
3	15	idol	30	20	67%	10	33%
4	12	pedal	30	20	67%	10	33%
4	1	morning	30	19	63%	11	37%
1	10	idle	30	18	60%	12	40%
1	11	mane	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	1	vain	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	3	wrap	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	9	great	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	11	need	30	18	60%	12	40%
2	19	lane	30	18	60%	12	40%
3	9	great	30	18	60%	12	40%
3	17	peddles	30	18	60%	12	40%
4	2	soar	30	18	60%	12	40%
4	15	stile	30	18	60%	12	40%
4	19	vane	30	18	60%	12	40%
3	10	current	30	17	57%	13	43%
4	8	main	30	17	57%	13	43%
4	18	source	30	17	57%	13	43%
1	5	knead	30	16	53%	14	47%
2	4	morning	30	16	53%	14	47%
2	5	root	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	1	vain	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	8	mane	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	11	source	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	16	stile	30	16	53%	14	47%
3	20	isles	30	16	53%	14	47%
4	5	wrapped	30	16	53%	14	47%
4	11	tales	30	16	53%	14	47%
4	14	currant	30	16	53%	14	47%
4	20	isle	30	16	53%	14	47%
1	7	sore	30	15	50%	15	50%
1	14	vane	30	15	50%	15	50%
1	18	grate	30	15	50%	15	50%
1	20	aisle	30	15	50%	15	50%
2	14	sauce	30	15	50%	15	50%
3	5	route	30	15	50%	15	50%
4	7	idols	30	15	50%	15	50%
4	16	root	30	15	50%	15	50%
3	14	soar	30	14	47%	16	53%
3	19	lain	30	14	47%	16	53%
4	6	grate	30	14	47%	16	53%
4	10	lain	30	14	47%	16	53%
4	17	steal	30	14	47%	16	53%
3	13	steal	30	13	43%	17	57%
1	2	route	30	12	40%	18	60%
1	12	styles	30	12	40%	18	60%
2	6	tail	30	12	40%	18	60%
2	7	cereal	30	12	40%	18	60%
3	4	mourning	30	12	40%	18	60%
3	7	serial	30	12	40%	18	60%
4	9	need	30	12	40%	18	60%
4	13	cereal	30	12	40%	18	60%
3	18	loan	30	11	37%	19	63%
1	4	sauce	30	10	33%	20	67%
1	6	steel	30	10	33%	20	67%
1	17	lane	30	10	33%	20	67%
1	19	rapping	30	10	33%	20	67%
3	3	rap	30	10	33%	20	67%
4	4	feet	30	10	33%	20	67%
1	3	mourning	30	8	27%	22	73%
1	8	serial	30	8	27%	22	73%
1	15	loan	30	8	27%	22	73%
1	16	feat	30	8	27%	22	73%
3	2	feet	30	8	27%	22	73%
3	6	tails	30	7	23%	23	77%
1	1	tale	30	6	20%	24	80%

4.2 Analysis of the Use of Each Homophone.

1) *Aisle*

The word *aisle* was tested in Tests 1 and 2. In Test 1, only 50% of the respondents managed to choose the correct homophone. In Test 2, however, this homophonic word proved to be more difficult as the task was not guided. Only 13% of the respondents gave the correct answer, while the other 87% wrongly underlined and replaced other lexical items like 'watching', 'at', etc.

2) *Isle*

More than 50% of the respondents provided the incorrect answer for this homophone. It was the 5th and 6th most difficult lexical item in Tests 3 and 4 respectively.

3) *Currant*

In Test 1, 67% underlined *current* instead. Here, the percentage of correct responses was 33%. Thus, this homophonic word proved to be the most difficult item in Test 1. In Test 4, however, 16 students made errors. Most of these students used the word *cereal* to fill in the blank for question no 14, thus producing the following sentence:

14) My mother puts a lot of cereal on her cup-cakes.

4) *Current*

This word is tested in Tests 2 and 3. This homophonic word was found to be more difficult in Test 2: 73% gave the wrong answer. In Test 3, the percentage of incorrect responses was 57%,

5) *Feat*

This word is tested in Test 1 and Test 2. In the latter test, it proved to be one of the most difficult lexical items for the students with 80% incorrect responses. However, in Test 1, the percentage of incorrect responses was only 27%. Again, in the Error Identification exercise (Test 2), other parts of speech were incorrectly underlined and replaced.

6) *Feet*

This was the least trying word for the respondents in Tests 3 and 4. 73% of the respondents provided the correct response in Test 3 and in Test 4, it was the easiest homophonic word. The percentage of correct responses was 67%

7) *Grate*

In Test 1, the percentage of correct and incorrect responses was 50% respectively. In Test 4, the percentage of incorrect answers was 47% . It was the 4th most difficult item or homophonic word in Test 1 but one of the least difficult ones in Test 4.

8) *Great*

This was the 6th most difficult item in Test 2. In Test 3, it was the 3rd most difficult. However, the percentage of incorrect responses for this lexical item was 60% in both tests. In Test 2, other items were chosen as being incorrect, for example 'admired' and 'a'.

9) *Lane*

This homophonic word is tested in Tests 1 and 2. In Test 1, it accounted for 33% of incorrect responses. In Test 2, the total percentage of wrong answers was 60%. It proved to be more difficult in Test 2 as this exercise was not guided and students found it extremely difficult to identify the wrong use of its homophonic counterpart – *lain* in question no. 19.

10) *Lain*

In Test 3, this word was tested in question no. 19. 16 students gave the correct answer (53%). In Test 4, the percentage of correct responses was similar. Here it was the 3rd least difficult homophonic word.

11) *Lone*

In question 18 of Test 2, 33% of the respondents identified *lone* correctly. In Test 4, however, it was the most difficult word with 70% of the students

choosing other incorrect words. Here, the answer given by most students was *great* or *grate* by some weaker ones. For example:

- 3) The great / grate wolf howled at the moon.

12) *Loan*

This item was tested twice . In Test 1, 27% of the respondents answered incorrectly, and 37% in Test 3. This homophonic word was the 3rd least difficult and the 7th most difficult item in Tests 1 and 3 respectively.

13) *Morning*

This homophonic word resulted in a great number of errors in Tests 2 and 4. In Test 2, other lexical items were wrongly identified and replaced, namely, 'work', 'goes' and 'at', thus resulting in only 14 respondents (47%) providing the correct answer. In Test 4, however, in the sentence,

- 1) "She goes for a jog every _____ to keep fit",

other homophonic words were inserted into the blank space, for example, *route*, *mourning* and *lone* thus rendering the sentences awkward! Here only 37% of the respondents could complete the sentence correctly.

14) *Mourning*

This item was tested twice. In Test 1, the percentage of correct responses was 73%. In Test 3, it was 60%. It is obvious that in the listening activity, the students were not able to interpret the sentence, "When the Chinese are in

mourning, they wear black clothes to show their grief”, correctly. They chose *morning* instead thus misunderstanding that “The Chinese wear black clothes in the morning.”

15) *Mane*

This homophone is tested in Tests 1 and 3. In Test 1, 60% of the respondents gave an incorrect answer and in Test 3, 53% did the same. It was the 2nd and 5th most difficult item in Test 1 and Test 3 respectively.

16) *Main*

In question 8, Test 2 – only 33% could correctly identify this homophone, while in Test 4, only 43% managed to correctly fill in the blank with this word.

17) *Peddles*

Peddles in Test 1 was the most difficult lexical item together with *currant*. Here, 67% chose the alternative *pedals*, misunderstanding the old man’s action in Question 13 as “going on a bicycle” to sell his wares.

In Test 3, only 40% chose the correct homophone; more than half chose the word *pedals* again as this was a more familiar word in their mental lexicon.

18) Pedal

This was a difficult homophonic word for the students in Test 2, with only 13% underlining the correct response. In Test 4, the percentage of correct responses was higher by 20% as it was a guided exercise and there were options to choose from.

19) Rap

Overall, the percentage of correct responses for this item was 67% in both Tests 1 and 3. In both tests, it was the 3rd least difficult homophonic word.

20) Wrap

This homophonic word, however, was more of a problem with less than 50% of the respondents getting the answer correct in Tests 2 and 4. Unlike its counterpart, *rap*, it proved to be more difficult.

21) Root

This word is tested in Tests 2 and 4. The percentage of correct responses was 47% in the former and 50% in the latter test. This was one of the many difficult homophonic words for the students.

22) *Route*

This word, however, which is tested in Tests 1 and 3, appears to be slightly easier as more than half (50%) of the respondents chose the correct answer in Test 1 and circled the correct homophone in Test 3.

23) *Sore*

In Test 2, this word was the most difficult . The percentage of correct responses was only 13%. In the overall degree of difficulty (Table 16), it was also one of the most difficult items for the respondents together with the words *pedal* and *aisle*. In Test 1, however, the percentage of correct responses was 50%. Nevertheless , it was an equally challenging lexical item here.

24) *Soar*

This item which was tested twice (Tests 3 and 4) proved to be more of a problem in the latter test. In Test 3, 47% of the respondents circled its homophonic counterpart – *sores* – for the sentence,

13) The eagle *soars* high up in the sky.

again indicating their ignorance of the meaning of the homophone *soar*.

25) *Steel*

67% chose the correct homophone in Test 1. This item was the 3rd least difficult word in Test 1. In Test 2, however 67% were unable to correctly

identify the word, and correct this homophone as the Error Identification task proved to be quite a 'feat' for the respondents. The students' vocabulary was just too limited.

26) *Steal*

In Table 13 (b), the Response Graph for Test 3 shows that 57% of the respondents used this word correctly in context. It was the 7th most difficult homophonic word in this test. In Test 4, only 16 students (53%) could fill in the blank with the word *steal*. There were other incorrect answers like *needs*, and *source* for the sentence,

- 16) The wicked old woman forced the young child to _____ some food from the grocery shop.

27) *Stile*

Table 16 shows that with regard to the overall degree of difficulty, this homophone recorded a fairly high percentage of the errors made. There is a strong possibility that the word is easily confused with its homophonic counterpart *style* thus resulting in less than 50% correct responses in both Tests 3 and 4.

28) *Style*

Only 17% could underline and provide the correct answer in Test 2. As mentioned before, in this test other items were underlined and replaced. The

overall analysis indicates that Test 2 was the most difficult task for the students to handle, again depicting a general lack of vocabulary in the English language . In Test 1, since there was a choice, 60% chose the correct homophone.

29) Sauce

Despite being a relatively easy word, only 50% of the students could understand and use this word in context correctly as depicted by their performance in Test 2. However, in Test 1, 67% of the students used this word correctly.

30) Source

In Test 3, the percentage of correct responses was 47% and in Test 4, 43%. This homophonic word proved to be equally difficult to use and understand for the respondents. In both tests, it was the 5th most difficult item.

31) Serial

This homophone was one of the easier ones for the students. Table 15 indicates that in Test 1, it was the 2nd least difficult item for the students. In Test 3, it was the 5th least difficult word.

32) *Cereal*

In Test 2, the word *cereal* was the least difficult item and the 2nd least difficult in Test 4 (with only 12 incorrect responses for each test).

33) *Tale*

In Test 1, 80% chose the correct homophone. Table 16 shows that it was the easiest of all the homophones tested. Obviously, this word is readily available in the students' mental lexicon, thus it was understood and used correctly in context.

34) *Tail*

This lexical item was also one of the easiest for the students. In Tests 2 and 3, more than 55% of the respondents answered the questions using this lexical item correctly.

35) *Vane*

In Test 1, 50% of the respondents found this item difficult, easily confusing it with its homophonic counterpart, *vain*. In Test 4, 60% chose the incorrect answer. In this test, it was the 4th most difficult lexical item.

36) *Vain*

This was also quite a difficult word to identify as the correct answer in Test 2. Only 40% of the respondents answered the question correctly. In Test 3,

the number of correct responses was 14 out of 30 (43%). Here, it was the 4th most difficult lexical item.

37) *Need*

In Test 2, the majority of the respondents underlined and replaced other words instead of *need*. The percentage of correct responses was only 40%. This homophone was easily confused with *knead*, thus, resulting in only 60% answering question 9 in Test 4 correctly.

38) *Knead*

In Test 3, in the sentence, “You must ____ the clay when it is wet”, 70% of the respondents chose *need* as their answer , thus, depicting their understanding of the sentence as “you only need the clay, when it is wet.”. Here, it was the most difficult item tested. In Test 1, however , it was the 3rd most difficult homophonic word.

39) *Idle*

In Test 1, 60% incorrect responses was recorded for this item. However, in the Error Identification task, the percentage of errors increased by 20% due to a limited vocabulary and lack of exposure to the word and its meaning on the part of the students. The word *idle* in Test 2 was also definitely one of the more difficult homophonic words encountered by the students.

40) *Idol*

Similarly, *idol*, in Tests 3 and 4, was equally confusing. In the former, only 33% circled the correct answer. Here it was the 2nd most difficult word. In Test 4, only 50% of the respondents could use and understand this word in context.

4.3 Types of Errors

The following are the findings from the analysis of data from Tests 1 – 4 on the types of errors made by the upper secondary Malay students of this research.

- 1) In Test 1, the errors comprised the use of the wrong homophonic word. 42% of the respondents were unable to visualize the concept behind each homophonic word. Therefore, they could not understand the semantic and syntactic relationship of each homophone in a given context.
- 2) In Test 2, most of the errors were due to overgeneralization of grammatical rules and the ignorance of rule-restrictions in the English language. 66% of the respondents underlined and replaced correctly-used grammatical items namely verbs, prepositions and articles with incorrect items.

3) In Test 3, 48% of the respondents, could not listen, comprehend and circle the right homophonic word as used in context. Again, the errors comprised the use of the wrong homophonic word. The respondents were unable to distinguish the semantic elements of the appropriate homophones in contextually suitable sentences. There were instances where misinterpretation occurred. For instance, in the sentence,

5.) They tried to find a route to get to the top of the mountain.

a few of the respondents choose *root* instead, misunderstanding the sentence as “looking for roots at the top of the mountain.

4) In Test 4, 53% of the respondents chose the incorrect homophonic words to be filled in the blanks. There were respondents who even chose words that were totally incorrect thus rendering the erroneous sentences nonsensical, and totally distorted in meaning. For instance, there were sentences like,

2. When there is war, the prices of many goods will needs
(wrong word).

3. The main wolf howled at the moon (wrong word).

4. My daughter loves rice sauce instead of wheat (wrong word).

Thus, these students display a general ignorance of the meaning, form and function of the homophonic word used in a sentence. In short, the errors

recorded in the tests were intralingual errors, i.e errors within the process of acquiring or learning the target language. Many of the homophone errors were local errors - errors that rendered the sentence awkward or global errors - errors that resulted in a sentence being totally distorted in meaning and nonsensical.

4.4. Causes of Errors

- i) As indicated in Table 16, the homophonic pairs *tale – tail*, *feet – feet* and *serial – cereal* appear to be quite easy as they are correctly used by most students. However, the pairs *sore – soar* , *isle – aisle*, *idle – idol* , *vain – vane*, *pedal – peddle*, *currant – current* and *stile – style* posed major problems. The words *aisle*, *sore* and *pedal*, for example, recorded only 13% correct responses. In the former homophones listed above, more than 70% could understand and use them effectively in context. We can conclude then, that most of the informants do not know the meaning, form and function of the latter homophonic pairs as they are not available in their mental lexicon. There is obviously a lack of exposure to those words. Hence, the acquisition of literary skills, that is reading and especially listening, is needed to increase the students' grasp of these lexical items.
- ii) Nattinger (1988), as mentioned by Tan (1994) , talks about “LOCI” – of how a language student acquires an item by means of cognitive

maps. A student would form a visual image of a given word and place it at one of the loci in his mind's image. A slow retrieval of these items will help him to understand or bring back the entire scene or image to mind. However, this research has shown that one of the reasons why the informants made errors is due to them being incapable of doing the above. When interviewed informally after the tests, these Malay students said that they used the 'hit and miss' method because they were unfamiliar with many of the pairs of homophones tested and it was never in their "LOCI", so they resorted to guess-work. In the language classroom, the teaching of homophones is often pushed aside to make room for other more important grammatical components. As a result, when there is such ignorance of the existence of homophones, the student is unable to visualize the concept behind each word, which then impedes his or her understanding of the semantic and syntactic relationship of each homophone in a given context.

- iii) There was also a strong tendency on the part of the students to underline other parts of speech and to wrongly 'correct' them in Test 2. Verbs were often wrongly 'corrected' due to overgeneralization and partial mastery of this language item in the classroom.

Thus, we can conclude that homophones are one of the many types of lexical items beyond these students' recognition and comprehension.